



## Butterfly House

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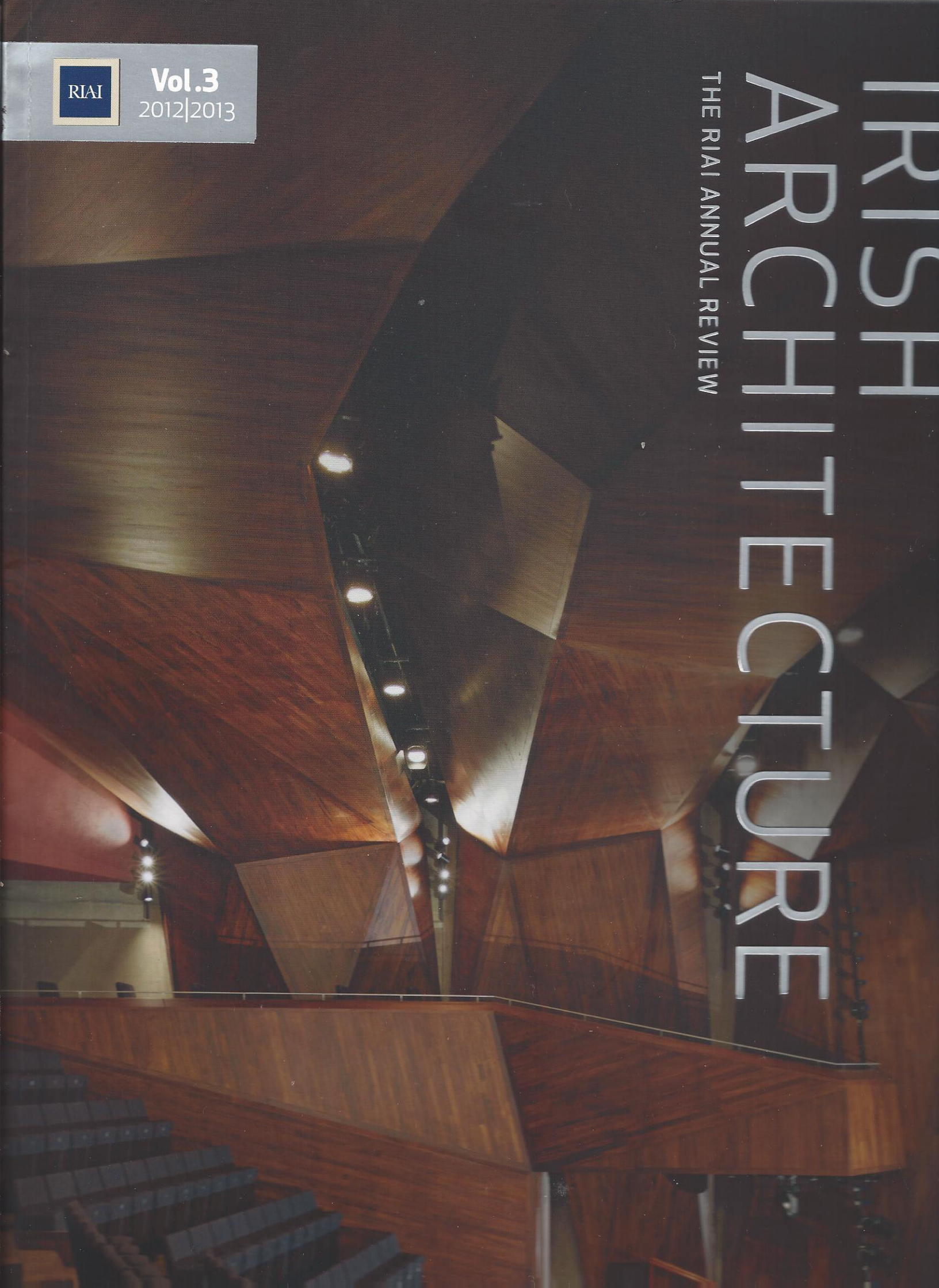
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# IRISH ARCHITECTURE

THE RIAI ANNUAL REVIEW





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# THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

LiD Architecture

## Thoughts About the Butterfly House

By Dominic Stevens

This is not a review, rather it is a collection of thoughts or feelings about this recent work by LiD Architecture.

When I visited one sunny evening in August, I found the house welcoming and enjoyable; relaxed, yet sure of itself. If I had been visiting the occupant, not the building, I would probably have said the same thing, somehow she fits the building just as the building fits her. This is a new addition to a house, a new addition to somebody's life, where the skill of the architect is understated; the architect acting more as midwife than obstetrician. However, as we know, LiD architects did design the addition, did re-interpret the existing house, so their modest invisibility is really sleight of hand.

### Informal

The addition of this butterfly room to the south-west of a previously rather austere farmhouse further adds to an assemblage of outhouses and sheds, decks and dormers that is so common in rural houses. As with many great things, it achieves an easy about itself 'rightness' that is difficult to describe, let alone analyse.

I have explained that 'logical' thought is what is expressed in words directed to the outside world in the form of discourse. 'Analogical' thought is sensed yet unreal, imagined yet silent; it is not a discourse but rather a meditation on themes of the past, an interior monologue. Logical thought is "thinking in words". Analogical thought is archaic, unexpressed. (From correspondence between Freud and Jung, quoted by Aldo Rossi in *An Analogical Architecture*, 1976)

The extension seems a result of what Freud refers to above as "analogical" thought, more the result of an outline dragged on the ground with a stick while talking with a client or builder, than a hard graft of numerous overlays and weighty concepts. This is deceiving; achieving this sense of informality through the rigorous and determinist process of design meetings, planning applications, tender drawings and siteworks requires the skill of knowing what is precious, what is important to the design, having a feeling for some unspoken sense of living. LiD have achieved this complex task brilliantly.

This is hardly surprising. LiD's practice is interested in this theme in a critical, well-argued fashion. Writing in 2007 about the culture and spaces of the squatting culture in Berlin in the 1990s, Sheridan, one of LiD's two partners stated:

*"In the situations presented by these abandoned buildings, the rules of occupancy are not laid out to begin with...normal assumptions about living arrangements may well be questioned and found to be inapplicable.... Both these instances - that of the building affecting the social interaction of the inhabitants, and the inhabitants'*

*adaptation of the building to allow different social needs - suggest that occupant and building have a less mediated relationship than is usually encountered."* (Sheridan, D. "The Space of Subculture in the City", *Field*: Vol 1, 1, October 2007)

Sheridan could be writing about the Butterfly House in this passage, and in the same paper he outlines why it might be interesting for an architect to work in this way: "Such situations allow the occupant to interact with the built fabric as though it were a landscape that is settled rather than a structure where the rules of occupancy are pervasive".

This is a modest position for the architect; replacing a signature style is an approach to making architecture where, as expressed above, the occupant and building have a less mediated relationship than is usually encountered. Very present here is the client and her concerns. While affording her architects great respect, she describes her house as of being a series of layers of alterations, additions and adjustments that she has carried out since moving here in 1999, this room being her latest.

### The Big Room

The client talks as if life washes in and out of the house through the generous openings of this butterfly extension and settles into its convivial spaces. Nature rolls up to the door bringing with it children and dogs, friends and neighbours. On the day I called, most of the children of the neighbourhood had been in and out during the day, and she describes how on any evening sometimes she would find herself in a gathering of people. This wonderful informal room accommodates this in a natural way, and perhaps encourages it as much as she does.

### Geometry and Type

Telling in the design is that the normal rural foible - where only strangers and the postman use the front door, everyone else going round to the back kitchen door - exists here, yet the back (kitchen) door is also to the front, welcoming visitors into the kitchen as they come up the driveway. It seems LiD have less of an interest in the formulaic games of type and more in architecture as an inhabited, changing, dynamic thing. The geometry of the room asks more questions than it answers, you are subconsciously asked to judge lines, connections to outside and relationships. This adds to the informal sense, allowing views and orientations to assert themselves, and giving a self-evident contrast to the simple, rectilinear rooms of the existing house.

It would be a wonderful thing if more of the architecture that we make might be as quiet, self-evident and accommodating of people's lives as this lovely house is.

Dominic Stevens divides his time between building, architecture and teaching. His practice focuses on making buildings and theatrical projects in the Irish countryside. He is lecturer in the Dublin School of Architecture DIT.

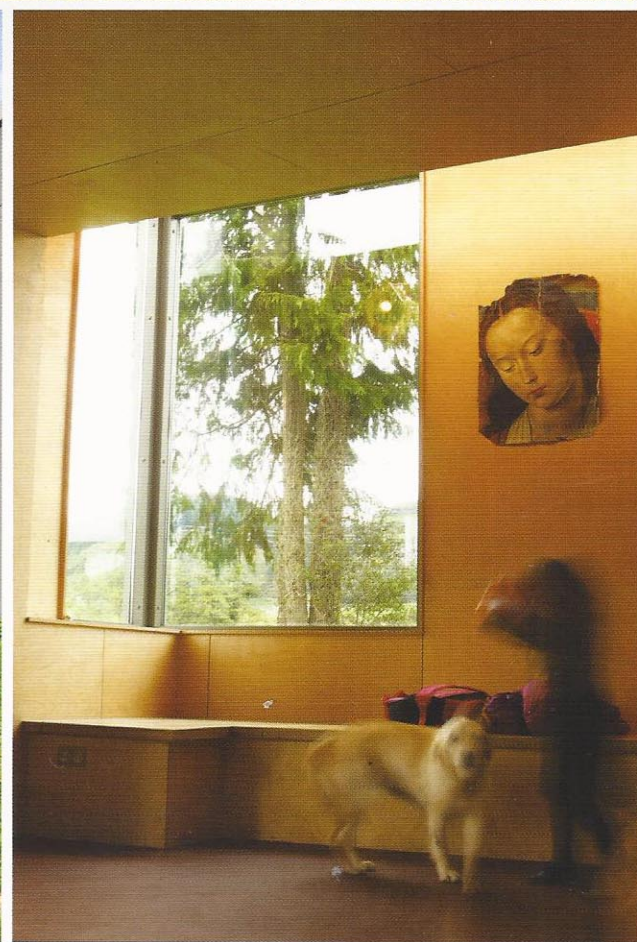
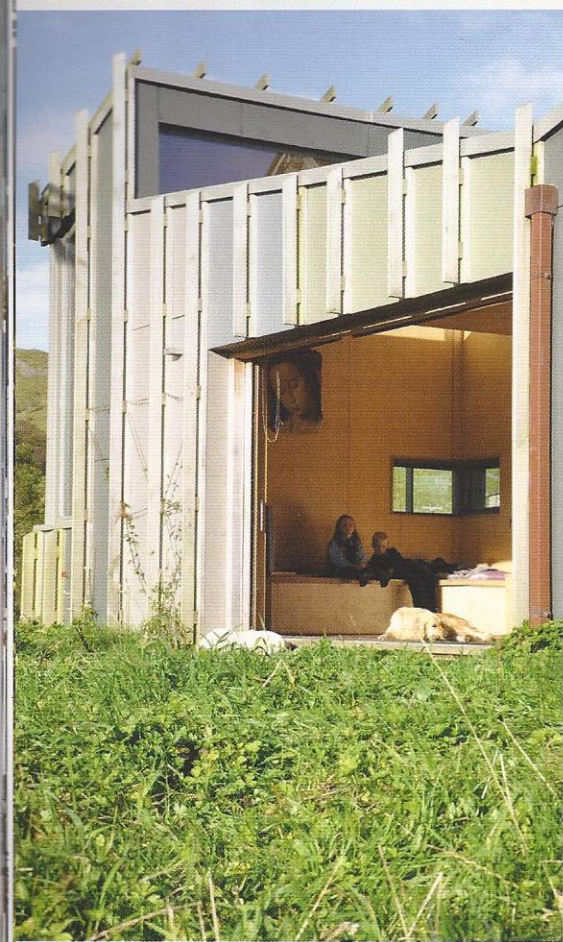
Location: Co. Leitrim

### Image

The materiality of the timber-framed structure utilises colour, rhythm, texture and the play of light and shadow to find connections to the surrounding rural context

Project Photography: John Sheridan/LiD Architecture

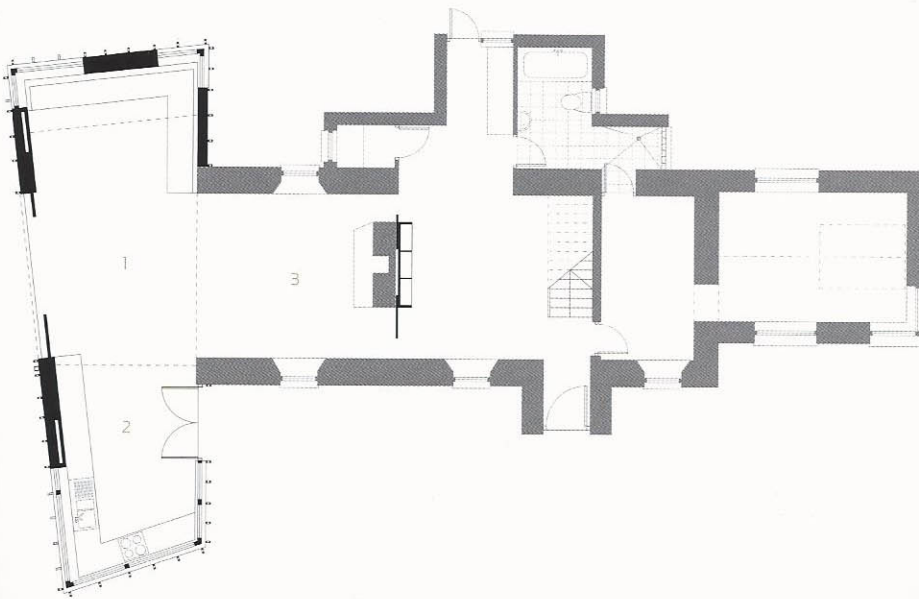




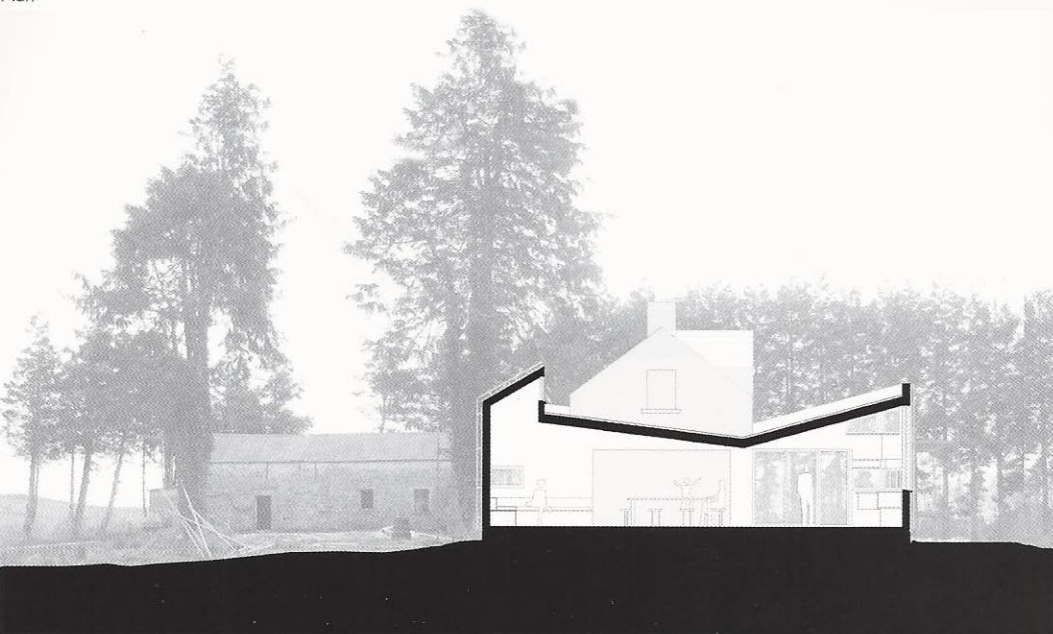




Site Plan



Plan



Section

#### Image

- 2 The cover strips for this cladding system are detailed to act as a growing structure for climbing vegetation, and articulated to allow light and shadow to give the façade a depth and layering in dialogue with the changing conditions
- 3 The extension is intended to connect the existing cottage to both the surrounding rural community and landscape.
- 4 The "ceiling topography" created by the butterfly roof form also provides subtle definition to various sub-spaces within the larger volume of the extension
- 5 A large dramatic space is created in which the daily life of the household is centred

#### Plan

- 1 New extension/living
- 2 New extension/kitchen
- 3 Existing house